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ANNUAL HISTORY
UNITED STATES ARMY, EUROPE (U)
1 JULY-31 DECEMBER 1959


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HEADQUARTERS
UNITED STATES ARMY, EUROPE
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1960

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5. Initial Incident

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The police met strong opposition at the Grunewald, Schoeneberg, and Tempelhof railway repair shops. At Grunewald 80 East German railway police and civilians clashed with 11 West Berlin police who later withdrew without removing the flags. While attempting to remove the flag at Schoeneberg police clashed with 30 intoxicated East Germans in civilian clothes. Finally, at the Tempelhof repair shop 2 members of the West Berlin police were seriously injured and 3 slightly injured while trying to remove the flag, whereupon the West German police were ordered to withdraw.

Subsequently, East German railroaders protested at Steglitz police station against the removal of the flags and announced that they would return to recover them. During the next 2 days 37 additional East German flags were hoisted on West Berlin S-Bahn stations. Before attempting to remove these flags, the police decided to confer with the city officials for instructions. From the beginning the Allies agreed that the West Berlin authorities should take the initial steps to preserve law and order.²

On 7 October an East German railway official threatened that, if the flags were not returned on that day or if further encroachments occurred, Allied trains would not be cleared to leave Berlin. During the day West Berlin police were positioned in the various S-Bahn stations in civilian clothes to determine how many East German personnel would prevent the removal of the flags.

The West Berlin legal position was that all S-Bahn fixed property in the Western sectors belonged to West Berlin and that the East Ber

²(1) Ibid. (2) Cable 23, US Man Berlin sgd Lightner to Am Emb Bonn, State Dept, 7 Oct 59. Both CONF.

³Cable 23, cited above. CONF.

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rights were limited to transit of their rolling stock over trackage. The East Germans apparently contended that such fixed property used in connection with the operation of the S-Bahn belonged to the East Zone, even though it was physically located in West Berlin.⁴

West Berlin's Governing Mayor, W. Brandt, advocated that in the next attempt only flags flying on S-Bahn stations proper be removed. Flags flying from large installations--such as rail yards or repair shops--where strong resistance was previously encountered and where terrain made operations difficult, were not to be removed. Although Brandt expected strong Communist resistance, he felt that West Berlin authorities should not yield after only one effort. He hoped the contemplated action would be accomplished without bloodshed, even though the police had, of course, insisted on permission to shoot if attacked. The removal of 75 percent of the East German flags would make clear that West Berlin did not intend to tolerate provocation of the population by displaying the East German emblem.⁵

In an afternoon meeting with the Allied commandants, Mayor Brandt reported that the police had been instructed to remove the flags, but that the action had been postponed pending Allied approval. He warned that, even if the police were to take no action, trouble might develop because numerous West Berliners, especially the workers, had announced their intention of removing the flags.

An even more important aspect of the flag incident was that the East Germans had resorted to violence against the West German police. Information received indicated that several hundred Kampfgruppen (East German paramilitary units) in civilian clothes had been brought to S-Bahn installations. The Communists had thus manifested their ability to bring large numbers of subversive elements into West Berlin on short notice with the clear intent of making trouble. It would therefore be necessary to notify the Communists that, if they did not cease their provocation, they would have to bear the full responsibility for anything that might happen. Even if this action did not stop the flag raising, it would benefit the Allied position in public opinion. It was then agreed that Brandt would issue the following statement to the press:

"Governing Mayor Brandt and Mayor Amrehn discussed this afternoon with the three Allied Commandants in Berlin the question of the flying of new GDR flags on the S-Bahn stations and other S-Bahn property. Mayor Brandt explained to the three Commandants that the flying of this flag within the territory of West Berlin was regarded as provocative by the People of West Berlin and was widely resented. He added that the S-Bahn had been used to introduce into West Berlin gangs of trouble-

⁴ Cable COB-287, USCOB to CINCUSAREUR, 7 Oct 59. CONF.

⁵ Cable COB-289, cited above. CONF.

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makers from the East Zone. The Berlin Senat will continue to maintain the closest contact with the three commandants with regard to this question. In the meantime, the Berlin Senat expresses the hope that the people of West Berlin will avoid any act which might lead to an undesirable incident."⁶

On the evening of 7 October the three Western commandants sent a protest note to General Zakharov, calling his attention to the provocative actions which had taken place on S-Bahn property in West Berlin on the last two days and asking him to prevent a recurrence.⁷

During the evening of 8 October East German Reichsbahn personnel removed virtually all the new East German flags that had been raised over S-Bahn buildings in West Berlin. The removal of the flags was apparently initiated by the Russians, who further ordered that East German flags would not be displayed in West Berlin on future communist holidays. The Russian attitude seemed consistent with the Kremlin's peaceful co-existence line; the prompt Soviet action resolved a potentially critical situation.⁸ Four days later the Allied commandants issued a press release in which they publicized their warning to the Soviet commandant "to avoid undesirable and potentially dangerous incidents in Berlin."⁹

6. Planning for Future Contingencies

In preparation for a meeting scheduled for 17 October, the U.S. Commander in Berlin reviewed the flag incidents and their implications. In his view two types of situations might occur in the coming weeks or months: Situations requiring emergency police action, where no advance notification to commandants by West Berlin authorities was possible; and situations where civil disturbances had not started, and there was time for consultation. In the latter case the commandants would have to be consulted, regardless of whether one sector alone or all three were involved.

A protest to the Soviet commandant was probably the first step to be taken in cases of civil disturbances instigated by the East Germans. However, no protest was required or desired in the event another flag incident occurred, for the Allied protests were already on record and the commandants were committed to prompt and decisive action.

If further flag incidents occurred, the West Berlin authorities would have to remove the flags in all three zones. While German police and Allied troops were not to become involved in initial action,

⁶ Ibid. CONF.

⁷ (1) Ibid. (2) Cable COB-290, same to same, 8 Oct 59. Both CONF.

⁸ Extracted from ACSI Daily Intel Bul, 9 Oct 59. SECRET.

⁹ Cable COB-299, USCOB to CINCUSAREUR, 12 Oct 59. CONF.

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there was no objection to alerting Allied units and holding them in reserve. Troops would intervene only if the West Berlin police were no longer capable of handling the situation. Contingency plans would have to be developed with the British and French before 7 November¹⁰ in order to achieve prompt, decisive tripartite action and effective police measures.¹¹

On 14 October the Soviet commandant answered the Allied protest note of 7 October by stating that the question did not come within the scope of his duties, but was entirely within the competence of the GDR authorities. He felt that these problems could not have any serious consequences; the authorities of the German Democratic Republic and of West Berlin could settle them without difficulties.

The tenor of the Russian note was considered mild and it was also observed that no claim was made that the S-Bahn property in West Berlin was extra-territorial. Allied commandants informally agreed not to reply to the Soviet note.¹²

In a meeting with the Allied commandants on 22 October, Mayor Brandt expressed his gratitude for the clear position taken by the Allies in asserting their responsibility for West Berlin. He suggested that the commandants approach their Soviet counterpart before 7 November, reemphasizing their responsibility for all of Western Berlin and expressing their concern over the East Zone provocations in that area. The Soviets might find it expedient to exercise a moderating influence on the East Germans. Brandt added that the Russians should be informed that on Allied orders the Berlin police would remove any flags hoisted on S-Bahn installations, and Allied military police patrols would be stationed in the vicinity as observers. Whether further flag incidents occurred or not, future misuse of S-Bahn territory by the Communists for military or paramilitary operations would have to be prevented.

Maj. Gen. B. Hamlett, the U.S. Commander of Berlin, outlined the American position by stating that the flying of GDR flags on S-Bahn

¹⁰ The anniversary of the Russian revolution, for which a large-scale display of flags in East Berlin was scheduled.

¹¹ Cable COB-301, USCOB to CINCUSAREUR, 14 Oct 59. CONF.

¹² Cable COB-302, same to same, 15 Oct 59. CONF.

¹³ Cable 33, [US Men] Berlin sgd Lightner to [State] Dept, [Am Emb] Bonn, 20 Oct 59. CONF.

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property in West Berlin was far more than a disturbance of law and order: it was a direct challenge to Allied sovereignty in West Berlin. The Allied position and prestige vis-a-vis the Communists would be seriously impaired if the commandants failed to live up to their own commitment of preventing future GDR incursions into West Berlin territory. For this reason all flags would have to be removed. Any GDR flag flying in West Berlin represented a challenge to Allied sovereignty. The West Berlin police would have to be committed in sufficient force to insure the success of the operation, during which Allied troops on alert would be visibly present in various parts of the city. If the police found themselves unable to handle the job, Allied troops would have to come to their assistance. The Allies could not afford to entrust the defense of Allied sovereignty exclusively to the West Berlin police, since it was doubtful whether the police could be relied upon to complete the job successfully without being assured that Allied forces stood behind them. Finally, every effort would have to be made to avoid bloodshed. If necessary, tear gas and fire hoses were to be employed, with firearms being used only under the utmost compulsion.

The British and French commandants agreed that more than law and order was involved and that some action was called for. They were unwilling to specify the extent of this action until more information was available on the planning and capabilities of the West German police, with and without Allied forces. The French were particularly insistent about these points.

The question of committing Allied forces in advance was discussed at length, but no agreed tripartite position was reached. The British attitude seemed to be based on an abhorrence of a situation that might result in bloodshed. In their opinion Allied prestige would suffer immeasurably if bloody incidents arose over the "mere matter of flags," whether they involved the West Berlin police or Allied forces. Moreover, the British were not convinced by the U.S. arguments that effective action could not be guaranteed unless the emergency use of Allied troops was authorized. They were also not convinced that the best means of preventing bloodshed was to prepare for strong, decisive measures that, in themselves, would dissuade the other side from embarking on aggressive action.

In short, despite the mutual agreement that some kind of action was required, positions remained basically unchanged. The French, whose ~~garrison~~ commandant said he personally agreed to commit Allied troops if necessary, apparently preferred to limit the number of flag-removal targets because they feared that the available forces would be incapable of attacking more. The British evidently wanted the flags to be removed only from safe targets to avoid violence. One British suggestion was that if the police encountered resistance, they should withdraw and then out the S-Bahn several days later, thus reestablishing the fact of Allied sovereignty over

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S-Bahn territory. The U.S. commander considered the 13,000-man Berlin police force capable of removing all flags from all three zones, unless the East Zone authorities were prepared to undertake a major operation entailing grave risks. It seemed unlikely that the Russians would countenance such an operation.

Finally, the commandants agreed that no police action would be taken against trains or barges displaying flags. They also reversed their initial decision and agreed to reply to the Soviet commandant's note before 7 November in order to reject the contention that the Russians bore no responsibility and to leave no doubt in their minds of the seriousness with which the Allies would view a repetition of the flag incident.¹⁴

The Allied commandants met on 27 October 1959 in the presence of various deputies and political advisers. While the British commandant had received instructions from London with regard to the flag issue, his French counterpart was still without definite orders.

The commandants agreed that all flags that could be considered a provocation should be removed. For planning purposes, they agreed that the police would be permitted to use pistols and heavier-type weapons, if necessary. Original British objections were overcome on the grounds that limiting the police to pistols alone would

¹⁴ Cable COB-306, USCOB to CINCUSAREUR, 23 Oct 59. CONF.

¹⁵ Cable 38, US Man Berlin to State Dept, Am Emb Bonn, 23 Oct 59. CONF.

¹⁶ Cable EC-9-5677, US CINCUSAREUR sgd Palmer to Am Emb Bonn for Bruce, 24 Oct 59. SECRET.

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increase the likelihood of Allied intervention. Although there was some disagreement as to the use of Allied troops on S-Bahn property, West Berlin authorities were notified that Allied troops would support the police if and when their reserves had been exhausted.¹⁷ Moreover, the West Berlin police were asked for a detailed plan of operations for 6-7 November. Such a plan should not be directed against the hoisting of flags, but should be limited exclusively to removing simultaneously from S-Bahn installations all GDR flags that constituted a provocation.¹⁸

Finally, the commandants agreed to send their Russian counterpart identical letters on 2 November to warn him that any new display of flags similar to that of 6 and 7 October would have undesirable consequences. This information was given in view of the common interest in maintaining undisturbed conditions in Berlin, to avoid the possibility of a misunderstanding, and to clarify responsibilities.¹⁹

On 28 October the German and American press emphasized the possibility of new flag-raising incidents. Later that afternoon, the Allied

At a political advisers' meeting on 29 October the French representative stated that his government had approved the removal of all flags within public view, but had imposed restrictions on Allied troops entering S-Bahn property. However, while the French Government would agree to military police accompanying West Berlin police in the initial action, it would not authorize in advance the use of firearms. The French commandant would have to obtain specific permission from Paris if he deemed such measures necessary. The British representative stated that his government also objected to Allied troops entering S-Bahn property. World opinion would be shocked if the West Berlin police were forced to fire on East Germans, but the effect would be even more disastrous if Allied troops were forced to shoot at East Germans.

¹⁷ Cable COB-314, USCOB to CINCUSAREUR, 27 Oct 59. CONF.

¹⁸ Cable COB-313, same to same, 27 Oct 59. CONF.

¹⁹ Cable COB-315, same to same, 27 Oct 59. CONF.

²⁰ Cables 44 & 45, US Msn Berlin sgd Lightner to State Dept, Am Emb Bonn, 28 Oct 59. Both CONF.

²¹ Cable 111, Am Emb Bonn sgd Bruce to US CINCEUR for Palmer, 28 Oct 59. SECRET.

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The British would prefer to let the flags fly unless the East Germans were to leave S-Bahn property and enter the surrounding area, in which case the British troops would be justified in shooting to prevent an "invasion."²²

²² Cable COB-317, USCOB to CINCUSAREUR, 29 Oct 59. SECRET.

²³ (1) Cable 47, [US Man] Berlin sgd Lightner to [Am Emb] Bonn, State Dept, 30 Oct 59. SECRET. (2) Cable 49, same to same, 2 Nov 59. CONF.

²⁴ Cable 50, same to same, 2 Nov 59. CONF.

²⁵ Cable 51, same to same, 3 Nov 59. SECRET.

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At this point the Allies were prepared²⁶ to deal with any situation that might arise from future flag incidents. As of 4 November the Intelligence Coordinating Committee, Berlin (ICCB), concluded that the East Germans no longer intended to raise the flags in West Berlin on 7 November. However, since the previous instructions with regard to flag raising had not yet been countermanded, the possibility of isolated flag raising still existed.²⁷

On 5 November the East German press stated categorically that the German Democratic Republic would not raise flags on S-Bahn and Reichsbahn installations in West Berlin on 7 November. In a front-page editorial the Neues Deutschland deprecated the London Times for getting excited about the flag question and insisted that the German Democratic Republic was dedicated to the solution of all differences by negotiation. It also decried the fact that the commandants had had to become involved in such minor questions, when the matter could have been dealt with in negotiations between the East and West Berlin authorities. Another editorial in the same paper was more aggressive in tone and attacked the so-called continued provocations from West Berlin. Both editorials followed the general theme that it takes two to make a quarrel.

The East German decision seemed to have been based on Soviet advice. Premier Khrushchev was said to have advised East German leaders to follow a discreet and cautious course on all controversial questions. The October flag incidents apparently had been initiated by a minor official, and East German plans to create a new flag incident to direct attention to the "abnormal Berlin situation" had been prepared before Khrushchev's intervention. To cover the backdown on new flag raisings, the East Germans repeated their claim to the S-Bahn and called for the lowering of the West German flag in West Berlin which they claimed was their territory.²⁸

The East German celebrations took place during 6-8 November. While the East Germans reported that their paramilitary units had made elaborate defensive preparations against aggressive measures by

²⁶ Cable 53, same to same, 5 Nov 59. CONF.

²⁷ Cable SX-6739, USAREUR to distr, 5 Nov 59. SECRET.

²⁸ Cable 54, [US Msn] Berlin to [State] Dept, [Am Emb] Bonn, 5 Nov 59. CONF.

²⁹ Cable SX-6774, USAREUR to distr, 6 Nov 59. SECRET.

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West German police, no flag incidents were reported in West Berlin.³⁰
During the last weeks of 1959 East-West tension over Berlin was
overshadowed by international meetings and preparations for top-
level conferences in 1960.

³⁰(1) Cable SX-6791, same to same, 7 Nov 59. (2) Cable COB-
327, USCOB to CINCUSAREUR, US CINCEUR, 8 Nov 59. Both CONF.

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